

### **Abstract**

A structure for an optical packet for transmission over an optical network comprises a packet header (30) and a packet payload (32). The header comprises first and second sections (34,36). The first section (34) comprises a series of clock pulses (40) at the data rate of the second section of the packet header, or a multiple or sub-multiple thereof. This header structure enables the clock pulses in the first section (34) to be used to control the timing instants when the header information in the second section (36) is read. The header information can thus be read using the data in the header alone, without needing to alter the structure of the packet payload. The clock pulses can be delayed in order to enable them to be used to control the reading of data in the second section of the packet header. The invention can be used in optical communications networks.

[Fig 2]